

Road board, union digging in

Court order continues; state fact finder due

By Tim Riehard
staff writer

They're talking to each other, but their heels are dug in.

The Oakland County Road Commission and the union representing two-thirds of its employees told a circuit judge last week they will bring in a fact finder to help them draft a new contract.

"The positions have gotten further apart as both sides get ready for the fact finder," said Bill Burling, a representative of Local 92 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO, in an interview after the brief court hearing.

"The issues that were open have not changed," Burling said.

JUDGE RICHARD Kuhn, who stopped a brief strike by Local 92 late in September, ordered the parties back to court Dec. 10 to report on what progress they are making.

"Hopefully, you may be here sooner indicating you have a contract," Kuhn said.

Local 92, which represents 300

hourly-rated maintenance and traffic safety employees, was told to work under terms of its old contract, which expired last June 30.

Members of Local 92 have rejected two tentative agreements — "overwhelmingly," said Burling. They went on strike for four days, but the Road Commission on Sept. 23 obtained a temporary restraining order from Judge Kuhn.

The judge said he wanted them to hold at least four bargaining meetings and give a progress report to him Oct. 17, last Friday.

THE TWO sides said they were able to meet three times, including twice with state mediator Leon Cornfield, and had agreed to call in a fact finder Nov. 13. John Edward Simpkins of the Michigan Labor Relations Board has been assigned as the fact finder, Burling said.

Gary Collins, attorney for the

Road Commission, asked what would be done if union members refused to work overtime or in an emergency situation. "The contract is not absolutely mandatory on overtime," he told the court.

"If there's an intentional disregard (of the old contract), bring it to the court's attention," Kuhn replied.

HERE IS the status of other union and non-union groups at the Road Commission:

- An AFSCME Local 1917 unit representing 11 superintendents ratified a two-year contract with annual raises of 4 and 3 percent.
- A Local 1917 unit representing 26 foremen ratified a contract with the same 4-3 pattern of pay increases. Both will go to the three-member Road Commission for its approval, which is expected as a matter of course.
- Local 529, representing 123 sal-

aried employees ranging from clerks to civil engineers, ratified a three-year contract with a 4-4-3 percent pattern of increases.

Non-union employees got the same pattern of increases. These include:

- 11 executives, whose raises are retroactive to last Jan. 1 and who hadn't had an increase since the first of 1985.
- 86 confidential, supervisory and managerial employees, whose raises are retroactive to July 1 and who hadn't had an increase since mid-1985.

The non-union personnel also were granted eligibility for the retirement plan improvement won by unionized salaried workers, effective for those who retire after Dec. 31.

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Lucas: Cut taxes, abatements

By Todd Schnelder
staff writer

Republican gubernatorial candidate William Lucas said a tax plan that he would implement would pick up the slack for property tax abatements for business owners, which he would phase out.

"The general business climate of an area is what will attract development," Lucas said. "Lowering tax rates for everyone, rather than a select few, is the way to go."

Lucas spoke at a Garden City Chamber of Commerce luncheon in which he called Democratic Gov. James J. Blanchard a "liar" several times.

Lucas cited a recent study challenging the effectiveness of granting a large number of tax abatements.

PROPERTY TAX abatements strategy have been used widely by many older suburbs to attract new industrial and commercial businesses. A local government can give a company a break of up to 50 percent for 12 years.

Lucas, the Wayne County executive, said his tax plan would stimulate the economy by cutting the state income tax rate from 4.6 percent to an even 4 percent.

Asked if he would also drop the single business tax, Lucas said that while he felt the tax was in some ways "unfair" to the small businessman, it would be difficult to replace the \$1.5 billion in revenue it generates each year.

The gubernatorial candidate said he would reduce the single business tax rate by changing the way the rate is determined.

IN A DEPARTURE from previous campaign tactics, Lucas' 15-minute address included several strong condemnations of the administration of Gov. Blanchard.

Lucas called Blanchard a "liar" several times. Lucas also was critical of a number of Blanchard policies.

Lucas appeared especially upset over the governor's claims that he, as county executive, was responsible for Wayne County's \$70-million budget deficit and that the county is facing payless paydays in the near future.

"In three short years (since taking office in 1983), I reduced the county deficit by \$200 million, eliminated wasteful departments, implemented a mass computerization of county resources and never raised taxes," Lucas said.

Lucas said that although Wayne County was in a tight financial situation, county employees won't miss out on any paychecks. He called Blanchard's statements to that effect "wrong and irresponsible."

IN ADDITION to phasing out future property tax abatements and cutting the state income tax rate, Lucas proposed several other changes in state tax law. If elected, Lucas said he would:

- Index the personal exemption to inflation beginning in 1988
- Reduce the inheritance tax significantly by limiting it to the federal inheritance tax credit allowed for state taxes.
- Limit local property taxes to 25 percent of market value of property beginning in 1988.
- Eliminate the "circuit breaker" tax rebate plan for homeowners but retain it for the elderly, veterans, farmers and handicapped. The "circuit breaker" gives homeowners an income tax rebate if they pay more than 3.5 percent of household income in property taxes.

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